DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 397 571 EC 304 899

TITLE	Inclusion: What Does It Mean for Students with Learning Disabilities?
INSTITUTION	Council for Exceptional Children, Reston, VA. Div. for Learning Disabilities.
PUB DATE	[95]
NOTE	6p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Council for Exceptional Children/Division for Learning Disabilities, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191.
PUB TYPE	Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Decision Making; Educational Philosophy; Educational Policy; Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; Federal Legislation; *Inclusive Schools; Individual Differences; *Individualized Education Programs; *Learning Disabilities; Mainstreaming; *Student Placement

ABSTRACT

This brochure summarizes law, policy, and practice concerning inclusion policies for students with specific learning disabilities (LD). It summarizes requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act concerning the availability of a continuum of placement options and placement in the least restrictive environment. It notes that mainstreaming and inclusion are not specifically mentioned in federal statutes or regulations. Model policies are suggested which emphasize the Individualized Education Program and provision of services to meet individual student needs. Implications for practice are mentioned, including the necessity of providing appropriate consultation, support, and/or direct services to LD children placed in general education classrooms. The philosophy of "full inclusion" is briefly explained. Research findings are summarized, noting that more than 80 percent of students with LD are in general education classrooms though there is no validated body of research to support large scale adoption of full inclusion as the only service delivery model for all students with LD. Finally, the brochure stresses the commitment of the Division for Learning Disabilities of the Council for Exceptional Children to categorical assessment, a continuum of placements option, and use of the IEP to plan and monitor services. (DB)

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INCLUSION:

What Does It Mean for Students with Learning Disabilities?

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Division for Learning Disabilities of The Council for Exceptional Children

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WHAT IS THE LAW?

Free, appropriate public education is required by law for students with specific learning disabilities:

- IDEA, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
- 504, Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act

Availability of a continuum of placement options is required by law:

- Special classes provide intensive, highly individualized instruction.
- Resource help provides specific skill instruction daily or several times each week focused on individual needs
- Consultation and/or in-class support provides assistance to general education teachers who have students with learning disabilities (LD)
- Accommodations and modifications in the general classroom provide the minor support needed for individuals to meet group expectations.

Mainstreaming and inclusion are not in federal statutes or regulations

Placement in a least restrictive environment (LRE) is required by law.

The LRE for a particular student with LD is the combination of settings in which (1) interactions with students without disabilities and the curriculum and instruction they receive is maximized, and (2) opportunities are made available for specific, intensive educational service to meet the unique needs of that child.

For example:

- Without using a word processor in his fourth-grade class, Leon's ability to express his good ideas would be restricted by his inefficient and poorly formed handwriting; the LRE for Leon may be the general education class with accommodations.
- Without intensive daily help, Maria's severe reading and writing disabilities will restrict her academic success; the LRE for Maria may be the general education classroom with curricular modifications and with one or more hours daily in the special education classroom.

MODEL POLICIES

An Individualized Education Program (IEP) should ensure parent and/or student participation in establishing placement, related services, and student goals.

A student's needs, not a district, school, or personal philosophy, should determine that student's placement.

Options across the continuum should be available to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities. For example:

- Mark's inability to remember math facts requires that his sixth grade teacher select appropriate times for Mark's use of a calculator.
- Anna's specific needs and IEP require that an LD specialist guide her in an intensive, small group setting for 3 hours per week.

Related or supportive services should be available based on individual student need.

If a continuum of placement options is not available to individual students with specific learning disabilities, the intent of IDEA is not being met.

State and local budget allocations and reimbursements should be categorical, based on the recognition that students with LD often require specialized programs, personnel, and resources.

Teacher competencies, certification standards, and licensure criteria should identify specific professional skills that are critical to effective teaching of students with learning disabilities.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The teacher in a general education classroom setting cannot provide the specific and/or intensive instructional services appropriate for some students with LD.

Students with LD who are placed in general education classrooms will need consultation, support services, and/or direct services from an LD specialist at varying points in their school careers to be successful.

Determination of the appropriate placement option must be made in conjunction with development of the IEP.

General education teachers can assist students with LD by using appropriate instructional practices, accommodations, and auxiliary aids in the classroom.

Personnel who possess specialized skills in learning disabilities must be available to assess learning and guide general education teachers in determining appropriate accommodations, adaptations, and aids.

Special education and general education professionals must work actively with each family and student to maximize integration with peers and independence at home, in school, and in the workplace.

A range of programs, personnel, and placement options must be available to permit selection based on individual student needs.

The different professional competencies possessed by LD specialists and general education personnel are both needed to achieve positive educational outcomes for all students with LD.

The Annual IEP Review must ensure a free, appropriate public education for each individual student with LD.

SOME CURRENT PHILOSOPHIES

Mainstreaming and the Regular Education Initiative (REI) encourage the participation of students with learning disabilities in general education classes to the extent it is appropriate to meet their needs.

Inclusion and inclusive schools refer to the placement of students with disabilities in general education classrooms or buildings.

Full-inclusion is used by some to refer to the full-time placement in general education classrooms of all students with disabilities.

A "full-inclusion" program, as defined by its advocates, provides placement ONLY in general education classes for students with learning disabilities.

In practice, the terms mainstreaming, inclusion, and full inclusion are often used interchangeably.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Although statistics indicate that more than 80% of students with LD are in general education classrooms, the data refer to all students with LD who spend any time in general education classrooms.

There is no validated body of research to support large scale adoption of full inclusion as the only service delivery model for ALL students with learning disabilities.

Past reports of studies focused on how well students with LD adapted in general education settings were often based on preliminary findings or partial reports.

Studies comparing the academic progress of students with LD across various settings or program delivery models have tended to produce inconclusive results.

Recent studies of the progress of students with LD in mainstream settings have shown that some students with LD can manage the mainstream curriculum if general education teachers implement accommodations and redesign the instructional environment.

Recent studies have also shown that many students with LD still need intensive, individualized instruction to achieve significant academic growth.

Recent studies of the social benefits of including students with LD in the mainstream have produced mixed results.

Several large-scale federally funded studies targeting the issue of inclusion are still in progress.

DLD ACTION

DLD continues to monitor research on model programs and to disseminate information on best practices.

DLD continues to lobby for the preservation of the services necessary to provide access to learning for students with LD. Our position includes a commitment to categorical assessment, a continuum of placement options, and the use of the IEP to plan and monitor services.

RESOURCES

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